BELLINI AND 'BEATRICE DI TENDA'

By Joseph A. Boromé

The artistic life of Vincenzo Bellini was remarkable both for its brevity and for the success which he enjoyed. In a single decade, 1825-35, he composed all his eleven operas, six of which long continued to hold the stage.[1] This record was unmatched in their first ten productive years by any of his contemporaries. Only twice did he meet with failure. When 'Zaira' (1829) sank into oblivion in Parma he accepted its fate with a shrug and salvaged many of its melodies by incorporating them into the deliriously applauded 'I Capuleti'. But when 'Beatrice di Tenda' failed he was stunned. He was at the height of his powers, triumphantly sailing the sea of praise with 'La sonnambula' and 'Norma'. The shock was therefore all the greater. As a sincere artist he was driven to soul-searching, and he charted a new course in 'I Puritani'. Yet to his dying day he never ceased to feel that the failure of his tenth opera was unjustified.

On 5 January 1832, assured that 'Norma' had an increasing hold on La Scala audiences, Bellini left Milan to visit friends and family in Naples and Sicily. Ovations greeted him everywhere. Four months of adulation bored and wearied him, and he set off on the northward journey home with a sense of relief. He paused for several days at Florence, charmed by the spell that only the capital of Tuscany can exert in the month of May. Here he encountered the manager of La Fenice, Alessandro Lanari. Lanari offered him a contract for an opera to be produced in Venice the following February.[2] After his usual lynx-eyed scrutiny of the financial terms Bellini signed. He reached Milan by June, happy in the thought that Lanari had guaranteed "the divine Pasta" as one of his singers.[3]

Once again, as he had done since the days of 'Il pirata', he turned to Felice Romani for a libretto; and once again he ran into proverbial procrastination. Romani, undoubtedly the finest Italian librettist of the age, was also the most sought-after, despite a reputa-

[1] 'Il pirata', 'I Capuleti', 'La straniera', 'La sonnambula', 'Norma' and 'I Puritani'.

[2] In July 1830 Bellini had signed a contract with the manager of La Scala, Giuseppe Crivelli, who was in partnership with Alessandro Lanari, the manager of La Fenice. It required him to compose two operas for presentation at La Scala in the autumn season of 1831 and winter season of 1832 respectively. When Crivelli died in the summer of 1831 Lanari took over the contract. This was the contract which was renewed in May 1832 with the important change that the second opera (the first was 'Norma') was to be written for Venice.

[3] Francesco Pastura, 'Bellini secondo la storia' (Parma, 1959), p. 338.

tion for keeping the hearts of managers and composers in their mouths by failing to produce his work to time. In view of their long collaboration Bellini seems to have expected preferential treatment. He did not get it. For two months he attempted to commit the poet to a subject. He was still empty-handed when on 10 August he departed for Bergamo to prepare the first performance of 'Norma' in that city. A month later he returned to Milan only to find Romani with cupboard bare and a graceful excuse: he was awaiting dramas from Paris. Once these arrived the two men had to select a story that could be built round Pasta, for the other singers of the Fenice company were not stars.

By 6 October they had settled upon Alexander Dumas's 'Christine; ou Stockholm, Fontainebleau, et Rome', which had had quite a respectable record of performances since its presentation in Paris on 30 March 1830, almost a month after Hugo's explosive 'Ernani'. It was a typical blood-and-thunder Romantic play in five acts with a prologue and an epilogue and a cast of twenty-two characters, including Charles Gustavus, Monaldeschi and Descartes. Faced with the formidable task of condensation, Romani agreed to give Bellini half the libretto in October and half in November. Bellini himself planned to begin writing on 8 October. Less than a month later, however, the Dumas drama had been dropped. On 15 September La Scala had inaugurated its season with the first local presentation of Mercadante's 'Caritea, Regina di Spagna'. The opening night had included a ballet by Antonio Monticini based on the unhappy tale of Beatrice di Lascari, familiar to cultivated Milanese through the histories of Andrea Biglia and Giuseppe Ripamonti and the 1825 tragedy by Tedaldi Fores.

When the powerful *condottiere* Facino Cane died, he left his vast estate of cities, troops and treasure to his wife Beatrice, Countess of Tenda. With her inheritance as a dowry Beatrice married Filippo Maria Visconti (1392-1447), Duke of Milan, an ambitious man who was younger than herself. The marriage gave Filippo the money and men he needed to defeat his enemies and consolidate his hold on Lombardy and part of Piedmont. But it gave Beatrice little except heartache, for Filippo soon resented his indebtedness to her and tired of her ageing charms. He fell in love with Agnese del Maino, one of his wife's ladies-in-waiting. Agnese became his mistress, though she was enamoured of a noble at court, Orombello di Ventimiglia. Orombello himself was in love with Beatrice, who suspected nothing and was faithful to her husband. To rid himself of Beatrice, Filippo falsely charged her with adultery and plotting his overthrow together

with Orombello. She was tried and condemned to death, though she pleaded innocence, and was executed in Binasco.

Monticini's ballet proved so popular that the management joined it to every opera performance for a month and a half. One October evening Bellini and Giuditta Pasta emerged from La Scala after a performance, apparently, of Mercadante's 'Ismalia'. They had both been enormously impressed by the ballet. Pasta, with her fine sense of the theatre, envisaged a wonderful role for her talents. She specially liked the closing scene. It recalled the closing scene in two very successful operas of her career: Carlo Coccia's 'Maria Stuarda' (1827) and Donizetti's 'Anna Bolena', which she had sung since its première in 1830 with electrifying effect on audiences. The Beatrice plot also appealed to Bellini. He had never really cared for 'Cristina di Svezia', and it had not taken him long to feel that it was not a work to inspire him to his best. Masking his lukewarmness for 'Cristina' with Pasta's enthusiasm for 'Beatrice', he endeavoured to persuade Romani to change the subject of their libretto. It was not an opportune moment. Romani, in the midst of a time-consuming love affair, was snowed under with literary and journalistic work, and was engaged to write librettos that season for Carlo Coccia ('Caterina di Guisa'), Andrea Majocchi ('Il segreto'), Mercadante ('Il Conte di Essex') and Donizetti ('Parisina').[4] Besieged by commitments on all sides he was finding it difficult to keep his head above water. Not without reason did Donizetti, usually a model of patience, soon write to his father in exasperation over the 'Parisina' that had not arrived: "Find me a theatrical poet less of a rascal than Romani in keeping his word and I will offer him 100 *scudi* to make a good book".[5]

For artistic as well as personal reasons Romani was reluctant to accede to Bellini's request. He argued that the final scene of 'Beatrice' would dangerously parallel the final scene he had written for 'Anna Bolena', and that Pasta would sing both: public appeal would be dulled. Even his subtle hint that Bellini might be inviting comparison with Donizetti, of whom he was pathetically jealous, had no effect. Bellini called on his ever-ready powers of flattery. He was confident that a man of Romani's great abilities would be able to vary the final scene so that it did not resemble the one in 'Anna Bolena'. Meanwhile he induced his mistress Giuditta Turina, the wife of the

[4] These works were presented respectively on 14 February 1833 at La Scala, 26 February at Il Ducale in Parma, 10 March at La Scala, and 17 March at La Pergola in Florence.

[5] Guido Zavadini, 'Donizetti' (Bergamo, 1948), p. 304. This was not a novel situation for Donizetti: he had received the libretto for 'Anna Bolena' forty days before its first presentation.

wealthy landowner Ferdinando Turina, to intercede with Romani as she had once done in the past. Conceivably Pasta also added her pleas. By November Romani had capitulated: annoyed at having to discard verses already laboured over, he promised a libretto but did nothing. For more than a month Bellini awaited Romani's pleasure. About 7 December he left for Venice with Pasta to supervise the Fenice's initial performance of 'Norma', which was to open the season. The rehearsals, which began on 10 December, two days after his arrival, showed him at once that the singers surrounding Pasta were as mediocre as he had supposed.

He was now almost unnerved, not so much by the anxieties flowing from artistic integrity nor by the probable desire to equal the outstanding success of 'I Capuleti' in the same house in 1830, but by the haunting fear that nothing would be ready for 'Beatrice'. The 20 February was moving relentlessly closer and still he had no libretto. Desperate, he appealed to Lanari. The manager hurried a protest to the Governor of Venice. It was transmitted to the Governor of Milan and Romani was summoned forthwith to police headquarters. Smothering his indignation at being sent for by the hated Austrian authorities who ruled Venetia and Lombardy, the proud Genoese and free citizen of Piedmont argued that Bellini had changed the subject and that he himself had obligations to the Milan theatres. Breathing fire, he repaired to Venice in January. As the first order of business he demanded an explanation from Bellini and Lanari in turn. He was met with an elegant example of Tweedledum pointing to Tweedledee. After "honeyed words from one and a sigh from the other" had somewhat calmed his resentment, he shut himself up in his lodgings to pen his *melodramma*.[6]

The fact that Romani had pointedly avoided boarding with Bellini was not an encouraging sign. The two collaborators had had disagreements in the past, some of them rather heated, but they had always stayed under the same roof when working together away from Milan. So slowly did Romani write that by 15 January Bellini had received only two pieces—the duet between Agnese and Orombello, and Beatrice's cavatina. Twelve days later the hapless composer was hoping "to begin the finale to Act I tomorrow, if Romani will give it to me".[7] The dilatoriness of "the God of Laziness" soon reduced Bellini to pure despair.[8] As late as 17 February he still had "to compose the entire second act!!!".[9] The Fenice management

[6] Luisa Cambi, 'Vincenzo Bellini epistolario' (Milan, 1943), p. 351.
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 333.
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 331.
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 335.

postponed the première until 6 March. The tension that usually gripped Bellini in the throes of writing was heightened by the web of circumstance. Bellini was no Donizetti. He could not—and would not—turn out an opera in ten days.[10] He required time for composing and for polishing. 'Zaira' had been born in haste and he well knew the result.[11] Even as he struggled to write 'Beatrice' he felt the sword of a "great fiasco" hanging over his head.[12] All the while relations between himself and Romani deteriorated rapidly. Bellini was deeply hurt at his associate's conduct and, in self-protection, adopted an Olympian attitude toward the librettist and abandoned the *tu* form in addressing him. Added personal turmoil came in the person of Giuditta Turina.

Shortly after reaching Venice Bellini was told that Giuditta had entertained a gentleman in her Milan home until two o'clock in the morning. Furious, the jealous lover ordered her to appear in Venice. She wrote declaring her innocence and her ability to produce witnesses. It availed nothing: Bellini insisted absolutely. Giuditta found herself in a difficult and delicate situation. Her husband had recently received "an anonymous letter" about their liaison.[13] While he had dismissed it as mere slander, he did not wish her to give currency to rumour by going to Venice. But Bellini, agonized over 'Beatrice', needed Giuditta, and she could not bring herself to deny him. With a fateful abandonment of discretion she wrung consent from Ferdinando and hastened to Venice. When she arrived Bellini treated her "very badly", but that storm soon passed.[14] Clouds appeared, however, from another quarter.

The audiences at La Fenice had shown increasing impatience with the inadequacies of the *basso* Federico Crespi. Bellini, who had tolerated him in the role of Oroveso, realized, as soon as the 'Beatrice' rehearsals began, that Crespi simply would not do for Filippo. At his insistence Orazio Cartagenova was sent for. This last-minute switch forced Romani and himself to adapt at least three pieces to meet the new singer's voice. Once again the première was postponed. Discontent, fanned by the press, rose among the Venetian public. The Fenice management had originally announced that its season would open on 26 December with 'Norma', to be followed by Persiani's

[10] In June 1834 he wrote to Giovanni Ricordi, with obvious reference to Donizetti: "Is it not possible that I too could write four operas in one year? However, I would ruin my reputation and suffer remorse for having cheated those who pay me" (*Ibid.*, p. 409).

[11] It took him three months to write 'Norma', and even then he used some music previously composed—for 'Bianca e Fernando' and 'Ernani', for example.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 335.

[13] Pastura, *op. cit.*, p. 676.

[14] *loc. cit.*

'Eufemio da Messina', Rossini's 'Otello' and Bellini's 'Beatrice'. Fortune had not favoured them. Persiani's work had died with its first performance; Rossini's 'Tancredi' had hastily replaced 'Beatrice' in February; and then Donizetti's 'L'elisir d'amore', offered in March to sweeten the further delay of 'Beatrice', had met with an unfavourable reception. As the end of the season drew closer and the monotonous procession of old operas continued, grumbles were heard against the management and against Bellini.

On 13 March a letter appeared in the *Gazzetta privilegiata* asking, with naïve trepidation, when the new Bellini opera was to be given. The letter, bearing the date of the first 'Beatrice' postponement (6 March) came supposedly from 'A.B.', a subscriber in Fonzaso, a remote little mountain village. Actually it originated with the editor Tommaso Locatelli, employing the general expedient of the fictitious character who comments upon conditions. In answering the letter from Fonzaso, whose inhabitants would have been surprised to learn there was even an opera in Venice, Locatelli pretended to be defending Lanari and Bellini. With great urbanity he cited the 'new opera' delays of the previous years: 'I Capuleti' (1830) given five or six times, 'Benjowski' (1831) given four or five times, 'Ivanhoe' (1832) given three or four times. Not only was delay not unusual but, judging by the law of diminishing performances that seemed operative, 'Beatrice' would come in for two or three performances. Of course, he slyly warned, one could never be sure. It might be postponed until the next year, so that Bellini might polish it up. After all, a year was not too long a period for composing an opera like 'Beatrice', which Bellini had promised to take to London. What was more natural than that the composer should wish it to be as perfect as possible when it crossed the English Channel?[15] These shafts fell on public opinion additionally stirred by talk that Bellini had dared to criticize Rossini's music at the rehearsals of 'Tancredi'.[16] Meanwhile the pro-Pasta and anti-Pasta forces of the city, determined to wipe out the incomplete victory at the 'Norma' première, girded themselves for 'Beatrice'.

On the evening of 16 March La Fenice was crowded to suffoca-

[15] Rumour had it that the London contract which Bellini signed in the spring of 1833 provided for presentations of 'Beatrice'. As an outcome of its unfortunate première, 'I Capuleti' was substituted (Pastura, *op. cit.*, pp. 380-381).

[16] Both Arthur Pougin, in his 'Bellini, sa vie, ses œuvres' (Paris, 1868), p. 128, and Antonino Amore, in his 'Bellini-Arte' (Catania, 1892), p. 233, mention this rumour in disbelief, adducing Bellini's admiration for Rossini's music. Bellini did not admire all Rossini's output, and he was not generous in judging the works of his contemporaries. However, he was always extremely tactful in expressing his feelings publicly. If he made a private remark, it is unlikely that its spread throughout Venice was a major factor in affecting the fate of 'Beatrice'.

tion. Outside the theatre the weather was bad, and inside the mood of the audience hardly better. Those who had purchased the libretto were brought up even sharper by the last lines of the preface, where Romani spoke rather depreciatively of his work as a 'fragment' and insinuated that the blame did not rest on him. The long-suffering Venetians knew whom to blame. When Bellini entered the pit to take the accustomed place for first-night composers he was greeted with whistles. He sat down and waited for the first notes to silence the house. He waited in vain: the overture and the first part of Act I were played amid chatter, laughter and kisses. Bellini thought he was at a fair. Though boiling with rage, he managed to muster his "Sicilian pride" and affect outward composure.[17] Occasionally he turned a stony face on the audience, but this had no quietening effect. When Pasta, who was always greeted with deafening applause, made her initial entrance there was not a handclap. Indeed, no sooner had she begun her cavatina than cries of "Norma! Norma!" broke out in parts of the theatre. (With great skill, it is said, she varied the repetition.)[18] Pasta waited her opportunity. On reaching the line in the duet with Filippo, "Se amar non puo, rispettami" (if you cannot love me, at least respect me), she turned and sang it with full force directly to the audience.[19] Stunned, they fell silent. At the end of the scene they gave her an ovation. The tension had been broken. Unpleasant noises subsided considerably and the opera ran its course. The second act, apart from the quintet, disappointed everyone, and its closing scene fell flat. Still, occasional shouts were heard for the composer. Bellini, outraged at the behaviour of the public, remained glued to his chair and refused to appear on the stage.

Two days later Locatelli published his *Gazzetta* review in the form of another letter to 'A.B.' of Fonzaso. He dwelt on the fiasco and the purloining from 'Norma'. By emphasizing the sumptuous staging of 'Beatrice' he obliquely absolved the Fenice management, leaving Bellini with the stigma of having delayed the opera. Bellini was furious at the fiasco caused by "factors having nothing to do with the merit of the opera" and at the imputation that he had copied 'Norma'.[20] To show up the "impudent ignoramuses" he despatched a lithographed comparison of two pieces—'Ma la sola, ohimè' from 'Beatrice' and 'In mia man' from 'Norma'—and also two accompaniments to the *Gazzetta*.[21] In the very same issue a

[17] Cambi, *op. cit.*, p. 346.
[18] Amore, *op. cit.*, p. 237.
[19] Maria Ferranti-Guilini, 'Guiditta Pasta e i suoi tempi' (Milan, 1935), p. 156.
[20] Cambi, *op. cit.*, p. 394.
[21] *loc. cit.*

friend of the composer bustled forward with a letter exonerating Bellini and blaming Romani, and informed the readers of the police episode, to the point of citing one of the documents by its official number.

This published letter soon reached Milan and the eyes of Romani. Stung to the quick, he replied in the *Gazzetta* with a waspish and lengthy polemic, which he revised into a stronger and more detailed rejoinder on 1 April and sent to the *Eco* of Milan.[22] In both letters he ascribed the changing of the original subject that had delayed the opera to Bellini's infatuation with women. The second letter, in fact, implicated not only Giuditta Turina, but Giuditta Pasta:

> I was supposed to give Maestro Bellini a melodrama, and not a *libretto* . . . Either Minerva was cruel to him, or another goddess took the place of Minerva, for July passed, August passed, September went and October came, and finally November, and that blessed subject had not yet been found. In addition Bellini had disappeared. The new Rinaldo was idling on the island of Armida . . . When Heaven so desired, he came forth; but the time had passed; and previous engagements, which I could not neglect, put me under the necessity of refusing him my work. Nevertheless, since he implored and re-implored me . . . I began to compose . . . 'Cristina di Svezia'. One fine morning Bellini's Minerva abandoned her severity and suggested the subject of Beatrice Tenda to him, and another fine morning my affection for Bellini and my respect for his Minerva forced me to the sacrifice of accepting it.

The consternation this letter caused in Milanese circles which knew that Bellini's mistress was Giuditta Turina is easily imagined.

In the midst of the uproar Bellini returned to Milan, having left Venice on 28 March with Pasta, after the sixth performance of 'Beatrice' (24 March) had closed the Fenice season.[23] He contented himself with the consolation of friends like Mercadante and maintained complete public silence. He prepared to fulfil a London contract concluded before the 'Beatrice' failure by consigning his house, furniture and some money to Giuditta Turina's care. With a strange feeling of presentiment he forwarded all his portraits to his closest friend Francesco Florimo in Naples. When, about 10 April, he set out for England with Pasta and her husband, the 'Beatrice' controversy was still quite alive in Milan. Individuals hastened to answer Romani, among them Pietro Marinetti (doubtless the pen-

[22] The Venice letter by "a friend of M. Bellini", dated 23 March, was quickly reprinted in the 27 March issue of the *Gazzetta di Milano*. Hence Romani's rebuttal on home ground.

[23] The box office receipts for the second and third performances, and presumably the others, had not been negligible. The opera apparently grew in favour and the public applauded the composer loudly. Real enthusiasm, however, was reserved not for the music but for Pasta's singing.

name of a friend of Bellini's), who lectured Romani in the *Barbiere di Siviglia* on conduct unbecoming a gentleman, and the editor, Giacinto Battaglia, who deplored the washing of two artists' dirty linen in public in a manner beneath that of "feminine gossip".[24] Romani, not to be outdone, wrote another letter decapitating one and all, and with abject cruelty accused Bellini of fleeing from the scene of battle. In the cafés and public places of the city he did his best to pulverize Bellini's name and disparage his intelligence. Those who remembered his savage attacks on Manzoni's 'I promessi sposi' were not impressed.

The whole affair was sad. The liaison with Giuditta Turina, who had inspired 'La sonnambula' and 'Norma', ended for ever. Before June scandal broke when Ferdinando unceremoniously put his wife out of doors and sued for separation: he had evidence in the shape of compromising letters which Bellini had written to her after his departure. Bellini's love evaporated before the public tempest. His correspondence with Giuditta dropped off, and he turned his attention to the pursuit of a wealthy wife. He himself, for several reasons, including faintheartedness in the face of possible condemnation for Giuditta's plight, never returned to Milan or his native country. The long collaboration with Romani that had given the world the succession of operas from 'Il pirata' came to a close. In 1834, through a common friend, Bellini tried for a reconciliation with Romani. After four months of silence Romani replied, accepting friendship. But he never communicated with the composer again, despite Bellini's repeated plea that they should resume their collaboration.[25]

The ill winds of 'Beatrice' blew good in at least one respect. Out of his mortification at rumours that he was creatively exhausted Bellini, who was deadly serious about his art, went on to a re-examination of himself and his techniques that led to 'I Puritani'. But he never resigned himself to the failure of 'Beatrice'. Three months after the Venice première it was performed in Milan. The following year it won polite welcomes in Palermo, Catania and Naples. Bellini was not satisfied. He hoped Maria Malibran would sing it, for he felt certain she would make the public realize its true worth; but that was not to be.

Encouraged by Giovanni Ricordi, Bellini intended to revise the

[24] Cambi, *op. cit.*, p. 358.

[25] Frank Walker, 'Lettere disperse e inedite di Vincenzo Bellini', *Rivista del Comune di Catania*, 8th year, No. 4 (October-December 1960), pp. 13-14. On the death of Bellini, Romani delivered remarks best received in the spirit of the adage *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*. In 1837 he made another edition of 'Beatrice' for Trieste, calling it 'Il castello d'Ursino'.

entire score.[26] No one realized better than he that the second act, except for the quintet, was weak. Its last scenes, which Romani took pains to keep from resembling 'Anna Bolena' by adding the pardon *terzetto* 'Angiol di pace', ought to have moved him to supreme music. They were made-to-order Bellinian moments that might have ranked with those of the 'Norma' finale which transported Schopenhauer into ecstacy. Yet precisely at this point Bellini floundered. Hastening pell-mell to be ready in time, he cut an extended duet between Beatrice and Agnese to a shadow, and ended the opera with a mediocre *cabaletta*—all of which compromised the dramatic effect.[27] He intended to begin his revision with the second act, and carried the autograph sketches and unfinished pieces to London and Paris. After the fatigue of composing 'I Puritani' had passed, he presumably hoped to use them in re-working the much marked-up autograph score. Death, however, took him in September 1835.

'Beatrice' made its way, after his passing, to London, Rome and Paris.[28] Its melodies were strummed on the pianos of the Continent. Though Liszt confined his transcriptions to 'La sonnambula', 'Norma' and 'I Puritani', Czerny, Thalberg and others took up 'Beatrice'.[29] Even "jeunes pianistes" had selections arranged by Ferdinand Beyer; and if we may believe the legend, Chopin asked to have the final cabaletta 'Ah se un'urna' sung as he lay dying.[30] 'Beatrice' crossed the Atlantic to be first presented in the United States at New Orleans in 1842. New York heard it two years later and again in 1847. Thereafter no American performances were chronicled for more than a hundred years. Throughout a good part of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries 'Beatrice' lay forgotten.[31] In 1935 Catania inaugurated its Bellini commemoration

[26] On 4 October 1834 he wrote to Francesco Florimo asking him to alter the instrumentation of the *stretta* of Act I (Cambi, *op. cit.*, pp. 441-442.)

[27] Pastura, 'Un duetto inedito della Beatrice di Tenda', *La Scala*, No. 18 (March 1951), pp. 44-48, analyses the manuscript of this duet, and reprints this article almost *verbatim* in his 'Bellini', pp. 573-580. When Vittorio Gui was preparing the Palermo revival of 1959 he omitted the closing *cabaletta* and had the opera end *pianissimo* after the chorus had sung *sotto voce* the pardon theme 'Angiol di pace' (Vittorio Gui, 'Beatrice di Tenda', *Musica d'oggi*, n.s., year ii, no. 5, May 1959, p. 197).

[28] London first heard it in 1836, Rome in January 1838, and Paris in February 1841: Dennis Arundell, 'The Critic at the Opera' (London 1957), p. 324; Jean Chantavoine, 'Bellini a Parigi', in Ildebrando Pizzetti (ed.), 'Bellini' (Milan, [1936]), p. 201; Vittorio Gui, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

[29] Czerny composed a 'Fantasie . . . sur les motifs favoris' while Thalberg wrote both a 'Fantasie pour le piano sur des motifs' and a 'Grand duo pour piano et violin sur . . . Beatrice'.

[30] Some say it was 'Ah! non credea mirarti' from 'La sonnambula'. Eye-witness accounts are silent on the subject.

[31] Thus there were performances in Milan (1835, 1841, 1843, 1845) and Rome (1838, 1839, 1840, 1844, 1863 and 1879). The Paris statistics show it was given four times in 1841, three times in 1844, twice in 1845, once in 1854, and three times in 1856.

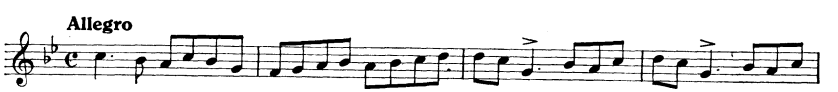
at the Teatro Massimo Bellini with a handsome mounting. This did not persuade opera managements to make similar attempts. Twenty-four years later Palermo revived 'Beatrice', under Vittorio Gui, for the Teatro Massimo. Times had changed. With the appearance of singers in the Pasta-Malibran tradition, interest in the early operas of the nineteenth century had revived. It was this operatic generation, familiar through long-playing records with the music of Cherubini's 'Medea', Spontini's 'La Vestale', Donizetti's 'Anna Bolena' and Bellini's 'Il pirata', that attended with interest the concert revival of 'Beatrice' in New York by the American Opera Society in February 1961 and the staging at La Scala in Milan three months later.[32]

A revival almost inevitably raises the question whether the verdict of history has been just. Commentators on Bellini's music agree that 'Beatrice' is not a masterpiece to rank with 'Norma'. They then proceed along different paths. Some, like Pannain, wave it aside as having little positive historic interest. Others hold with Vittorio Gui that the very opposite is true. They point to the abundance of beautiful melodies, the advance beyond 'Norma' in instrumentation and the variety of harmonies, and the increased role given to the orchestra. They also point to Bellini's use of forceful dialogue and his handling of dramatic scenes.

The characters in order of appearance are:

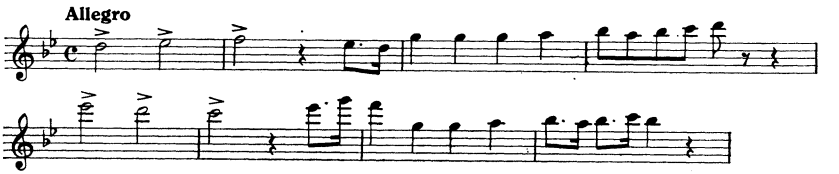
Filippo Maria Visconti, Duke of Milan	Baritone
Agnese del Maino, mistress of Filippo and secretly in love with	Mezzo-soprano
Orombello, Lord of Ventimiglia	Tenor
Beatrice di Tenda, wife of Filippo	Soprano
Rizzardo del Maino, Agnese's brother and Filippo's confidant	Bass
Anichino, formerly minister of Facino Cane, Beatrice's first husband, and friend of Orombello	Tenor
Courtiers, Judges, Officials, Knights, Ladies, Maids of Honour, and Soldiers.	

The prelude, limited to four pages of the vocal score, departs from the usual overture form to set forth in rapid succession and in the same key three different themes that recur during the opera. The first, of Rossinian cast, is associated with pleading for mercy:

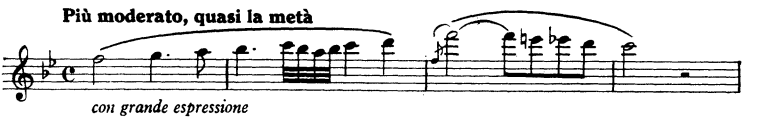


[32] In both instances the leading role was sung by Joan Sutherland.

The second, vigorous and courtly, later introduces Beatrice's maids of honour as they enter the ducal gardens:

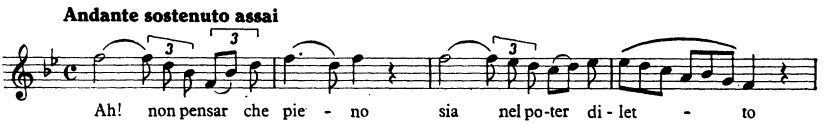


The third is Beatrice's prayer:

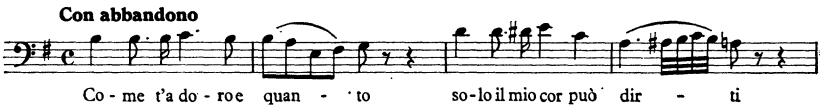


ACT I

The curtain rises on a courtyard in the castle of Binasco, a city which Beatrice inherited from her first husband Facino Cane. Filippo meets with his courtiers and complains at his shame in having to share the reins of government with a woman. As they are urging him in a repetitous and 'Rigoletto'-type chorus to act resolutely, the voice of Agnese is heard from within the palace singing a sweet song on the power of true love:



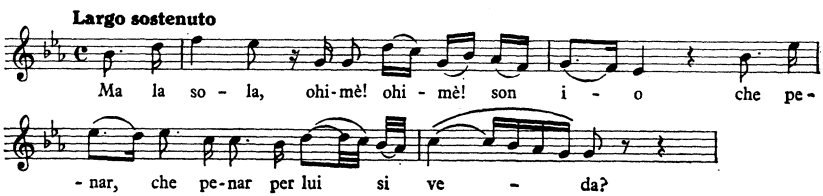
Fired by her words Filippo determines to rid himself of Beatrice:



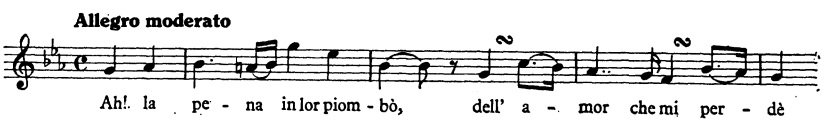
The second scene takes place within the palace just before sunrise. In her room Agnese awaits Orombello, to whom she has sent an anonymous note, inviting him to follow the sound of lute music. He enters and is surprised to see her and not Beatrice, whom he rashly hoped had written the note. Agnese gently tells him she knows that he is in love, having watched him closely at court. Orombello is embarrassed to admit it, and Agnese assumes his

reluctance is due to his affection for her and respect for her position. She presses him further in a pleasant duet, and in a moment of confusion he let slips the name of Beatrice. Agnese feels humiliated. She swears revenge despite Orombello's pleas for forgiveness.

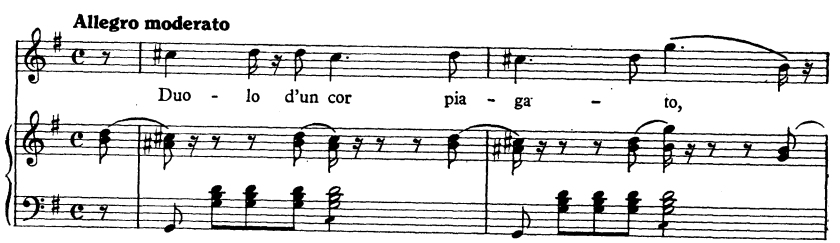
The day has dawned and Beatrice comes into the ducal garden with her maids of honour (second theme of the prelude) to escape the palace atmosphere, which depresses her. She is sad at the loss of her husband's love and the suspicion that he has a mistress. Bellini's music rises to a superior level as her attendants try to comfort her in a felicitous chorus which, though charming in its harmonies and delicately scored, ends in a lively enough fashion. But Beatrice can only lament that she has allowed her people to fall under Filippo's subjection:



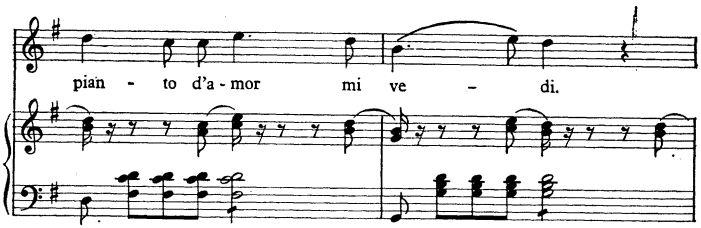
Still, she entrusts herself to Heaven's mercy and help in a *cabaletta* which towards the close of each verse has a twice-repeated *sostenuto* passage of breath-taking beauty:



The attendants leave; Filippo, who with Rizzardo has been watching from away, draws near. He reproaches Beatrice with avoiding him out of loathing and hatred. No, she replies; if she avoids him, it is because she is jealous of the love he now gives to another:[33]

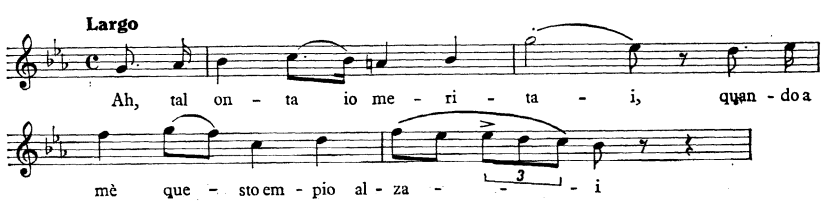


[33] Bellini transferred these passages with slight variations from 'Zaira'.



Filippo retorts that she is jealous only of her power. He then calls her disloyal and produces a portfolio of documents which Agnese had stolen and given him. The documents are petitions from Facino Cane's vassals, including Orombello, who are discontented with Filippo's rule. Filippo accuses Beatrice of aiding his rebellious subjects and loving Orombello. Beatrice indignantly rejects her husband's accusations and begs for her papers. Filippo refuses. The orchestra underlines the excitement of the scene with a rhythmic pattern that leads to a spirited close.

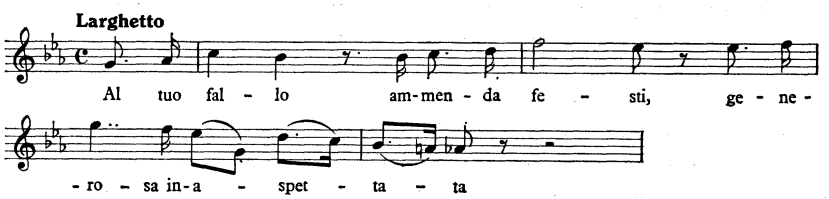
The next scene takes place in a remote gallery in the castle. A troop of knights appear, discussing their orders to spy on Orombello in music whose accompaniment seems no stranger to ears familiar with passages in the second act of 'Norma' (after the words "Roma!! Ed è? prosegui"). As they depart Beatrice enters. Before a statue of her first husband she grieves over her intemperate marriage in elegiac music that soars to Heaven (third theme of the prelude). Orombello arrives and overhears her last words. He informs her that he has gathered forces at Tortone, where Facino Cane's vassals await Beatrice's word in order to rise to her defence against Filippo. He asks her to flee with him that very night. Beatrice replies that she cannot entrust her defence to him. His concern for her might be thought to be motivated by passion. Her name and honour must be preserved. When he confesses that he does indeed love her, she orders him away. He throws himself at her feet to beg for forgiveness. Suddenly Filippo and the entire court appear. The Duke openly accuses his wife of infidelity. The grand finale begins with a Rossinian *largo* that ends in a majestic, flowing line:



Filippo orders Orombello and Beatrice to be arrested. Orombello tries to protest that Beatrice is innocent, but Filippo cuts him short. Beatrice asks repeatedly if no man present has the courage to defend her honour: she commends her cause to God, and after a rather bombastic *stretta* the act closes as she and Orombello are placed under arrest.

ACT II

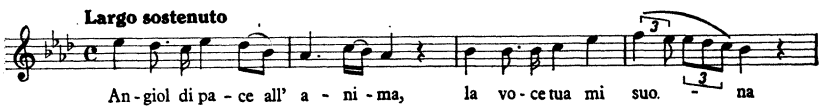
In a great hall of the castle, fitted up as a tribunal, Beatrice's maids of honour ask how so infamous a trial can be held. They are told by the courtiers, in solemn accents, how Orombello, under torture, confessed his guilt and implicated Beatrice. A dramatic pause interrupts the music for almost two bars, as the chorus bemoans the inevitable fate of Beatrice. Anichino enters with Filippo and entreats mercy for Beatrice, especially since her subjects have become restless at the latest news. Filippo answers by sending soldiers to the gates of the city with orders to admit no one, and mounts his throne. The judges arrive and take their places with Rizzardo as presiding officer. Members of the Court fill the hall, among them Agnese, conscience-stricken in this moment of triumph. After Filippo has addressed the judges Beatrice is led in by guards. She refuses to recognize the authority of the judges since they are her vassals, and she implores Filippo not to dishonour her name with baseless charges. Orombello, weakened by torture, is brought in: confronted with the stoic Beatrice he repudiates his confession and declares her innocent. Then begins, after an extended repetition of the first theme of the prelude, the great quintet—the finest writing in the score:



It is the type of melodic dialogue, at once uniform and varied, in which Bellini had excelled in 'Norma'. During the quintet he builds up an impressive crescendo by having the orchestra accompany the voices with an eightfold repetition of the first theme of the prelude. The musical line broadens, and the ensemble moves towards a climax, sonorous and effective. All Orombello's hearers are moved

except the judges. They demand that the law be satisfied by a new trial after both of the prisoners have been put to torture. Orombello and Beatrice are taken away and the judges and Court depart. Agnese, full of remorse, pleads with Filippo to pardon Beatrice, who, she is convinced, is innocent. He orders her to go but cannot calm his own doubts. Anichino soon tells him Beatrice has not confessed, nevertheless the judges have condemned her to death. Only his signature is needed to carry out the sentence. Filippo hesitates and is about to tear up the death warrant when the courtiers rush in to say that Beatrice's armed subjects are at the outer walls demanding her freedom. Filippo signs.

The final scene takes place in a hall leading to the prisons of the castle. Beatrice's ladies and friends mourn the unhappy tidings in a noteworthy chorus. Beatrice comes from prison on her way to execution. She affirms her innocence and asks divine punishment for Filippo and his accomplices. A distraught Agnese rushes in and confesses her guilt to Beatrice. Beatrice's terrible anger is stayed when, from a distant tower, the dying Orombello is heard granting pardon to his enemies:[34]



There follows a brief but admirable *terzetto*. Moved by Orombello's utterance Beatrice follows his example. A funeral march is heard and officials enter. As they surround Beatrice, Agnese faints. Before she is led away Beatrice begs the women to decorate her tomb with flowers and welcomes death with honour.[35]

All in all, 'Beatrice' contains a fair share of very creditable music. May it not be that the blame for its failure should rest on shoulders other than Bellini's? Because of the Romani affair, biographers of Bellini have tended to pounce on the libretto. Truth to tell, it is not inferior to others of the day, being a typical Renaissance plot, popular then and now. Romani knew what he was about and Bellini himself thought he received "good poetry."[36] Nowhere,

[34] This theme too Bellini sketched from 'Zaira'.
[35] The aria finale 'Ah se un'urna' was a Rossinian melody which Bellini took from his own 'Bianca e Fernando'.
[36] Cambi, *op. cit.*, p. 333.

however, did the composer express prolonged personal enthusiasm for the subject, holding indeed that Filippo's character was repulsive:

> I confess the subject is horrible; but . . . I tried with my music to modify and minimize the disgust the character of Filippo arouses.[37]

What the libretto did lack was the important traditional element of sensual love between tenor and soprano. The only opportunity they had was a *duettino* that finished before it had begun. Since contempory criticism made no point of the resemblance to 'Anna Bolena' (Henry VIII and Filippo, Jane Seymour and Agnese, Percy and Orombello, Anna and Beatrice) this aspect probably appeared unimportant to the public.

Romani's conduct before and after the affair leaves a bad taste in the mouth, and can only incline the observer to sympathize with Bellini. It is more than possible that, by adding to the high tension under which the composer lived in Venice, it was he, more than any single person or factor, who accounted for the failure of Bellini to produce a work worthy of his mature years. The opera failed in its day, and it is not difficult to predict a cloudy future for it after the revivals of our time. The score shows on almost every page that Bellini was moving from the instrumentation of 'Norma' to that more fully revealed in 'I Puritani'. Occasionally the music strikes fire and soars above earth. When it does Bellini is true to his gifts. Too often, however, it coasts along on a good melody that might have been better. The pieces of the opera do not fit together (some seem mere space-fillers); they are not fused together to make a whole. 'Beatrice' failed because the gossip and turbulence surrounding Bellini did not allow him to commune with his muse as was his wont. Had he lived to rewrite it to his satisfaction he would undoubtedly have transformed it into a glowing work and repeated the vindication of 'Zaira'.

[37] Cambi, *op. cit.*, p. 395. It is necessary here to note that Bellini did not say the libretto "stank of murder", as is sometimes stated. He used that phrase only in relation to the preface which Romani wrote for the libretto.